

INFANT BLINDNESS IN
MASSACHUSETTS

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AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

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Survey, Oct. 1, 1910

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THE COMMON WELFARE

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Are you always able to get all the help you want?

What kind of labor do you find scarce?
What kind of labor is over-supplied? etc.

Finally both employers and trade union secretaries were asked to give their opinions in regard to the establishment of state labor exchanges, and also to furnish the commission with any observations they cared to make in regard to the causes, extent and effects of unemployment and the remedies therefor. The response to these inquiries has been very gratifying. Replies have been received from 728 employers and 388 trade unions, and they are still coming in, so that there is a prospect of securing statistics of exceptional value.

INFANT BLINDNESS IN MASSACHUSETTS

Dr. Simon Flexner's condemnation of certain medical schools and colleges which are turning out inefficient practitioners is effectively supported by recent investigations of the research department of the Boston School for Social Workers. Through a study of ophthalmia neonatorum in five cities of the commonwealth the investigators discovered that the usual prophylactic employed by the graduates of a certain well known French-Canadian school is lemon juice. Mr. Pickwick's friend, Dr. Sawyer, could get some pointers from these M. D.'s.

Taking into consideration the general lack of knowledge and the carelessness of doctors in charge of newly born children, it is not surprising that the Massachusetts investigators found, as a result of interviewing ninety-five physicians in five cities, that only seventeen per cent of the babies were protected from possible blindness by the routine use of a prophylactic. The records of 5,949 births were examined—forty-eight per cent of the total births of the five cities—and forty-two per cent of the physicians never used preventive measures. Forty-one per cent did or did not take proper precaution according to their own judgment.

The new law which has gone into effect in Massachusetts, allowing \$2,500

for the free distribution of a prophylactic, ought to clear up matters considerably, for with every vial of silver nitrate, which will be sent to all physicians in the state, is a folder describing the absolute necessity for precautionary measures if infantile blindness is to be prevented.

The investigation also showed laxity of practitioners in complying with the law requiring that cases be reported. In the cities investigated it was found that 18,421 births had been recorded in 1909. Thirty-three cases of ophthalmia neonatorum had been reported to local boards of health, while 108 cases were discovered by the investigators.

In spite of the fact that the midwife has no legal status in Massachusetts, she plies her trade extensively, especially in the foreign quarters of smaller cities. In four of the cities investigated, where 14,795 births had been recorded in 1909, 2,083, or seven per cent, had been recorded by midwives who, however, seem no more to blame than physicians for blindness among babies.

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind has issued a social service study of 116 cases of ophthalmia neonatorum cared for in the Massachusetts Charitable Eye and Ear Infirmary. Summarizing the situation this pamphlet says:

The general practitioner has yet much to learn of the disease, and the parents know nothing of it. Upon these two groups—the practitioners and the parents—the baby must depend for the gift of sight, and the campaign of education must be carried on to include the two.

So far as this study shows, only four babies of the six made blind within the year are alive today (three in this state); but the fact that six babies were made blind should not be lost sight of. Dead blind babies tell no tales and so make no impression on the public; but in closing the case against infant ophthalmia, these dead babies, as well as their perhaps less fortunate fellow-victims who live to grope their way through life, should appear as evidence. Those made blind, and for whom the state has to provide special and expensive education, do not begin to tell the whole story of ophthalmia neonatorum; nor do the totally blind babies complete the records of this disease; there are also those who have been made blind in one eye, thus handicapped in sight and appearance, whose chance of going through life successfully is hardly more than half that of the person with normal

vision. Still others are disfigured by scars on the eyes, and disabled by defective vision. When one considers that the question of ophthalmia neonatorum no longer admits of debate,—that the cases that do not respond to proper treatment are so rare as to be left out of the reckoning,—the number of blind and disabled from this cause in a single year is appalling. And the pity of it is that the burden is put upon a helpless baby,—and this thing need not be!

MEMPHIS STRUGGLES FOR PLAYGROUNDS

If persistency counts in bringing home a sense of social responsibility to a community, the efforts of the Memphis, Tenn., Playground Association will be crowned with success. Here, as in many other southern cities, the development of a community interest is slow and uphill work. But recent indications point to a new era.

The association, of which Mrs. Thomas M. Scruggs is president, voted last May to secure the fullest possible public expression as to the need for public playgrounds and baths, and suggestions as to ways and means, by a list of suggestive questions to be submitted to all the organized bodies of the city. These questions called attention to Memphis's prosperity and its comparative lack of provision for its unfortunates, emphasizing particularly its apparent neglect of its children. The lack of recognition here that "the most valuable asset of a city is its children," is evidenced by the failure to provide adequate public schools and playgrounds for them.

Though the Playground Association last March purchased a site for a playground, club and free bath and offered, in co-operation with the city, to pay all but \$6,000 of the expense of building, the Board of Education has failed to make an appropriation to meet the deficit. Nevertheless, the association has not lost courage, but has enlisted the working people in its campaign. In the Labor Day parade every man wore a small paper shield bearing the inscription, "For Memphis Children, Public Playground and Public Baths." This was the suggestion of Rosa Lee, one of the directors of the association, to whom also was

due the playground float, conspicuous in the line of march.

JUDICIAL DISREGARD OF LAW

THE SURVEY of September 10 referred to the reorganization of the Children's Courts and Magistrates' Courts in New York city under the provisions of the law drafted by the Page Commission. THE SURVEY expressed regret that the newly appointed chief justice of the Court of Special Sessions should have continued in the Manhattan Children's Court the system of monthly rotation of judges. Similar opinions have been expressed by the New York *Tribune* and the New York *Times*. Chief Justice Russell, in a communication to the *Tribune* of September 11, defends the monthly assignments. THE SURVEY has made further inquiries, and finds that the facts are even more unfortunate than was suggested in its issue of September 10. While not questioning the excellent intentions of Chief Justice Russell, we cannot escape the conclusion that he has been led into a very serious error, and that he should retrace his footsteps. The Children's Courts in New York city are legitimately a matter of interest to juvenile court workers throughout the country, and the matter seems to us sufficiently important to discuss somewhat fully.

In order to understand clearly the present situation, it should be recalled that for some years the custom in the Manhattan Juvenile Court had been that of a monthly rotation. The six justices of the Court of Special Sessions, First Division, were assigned to monthly periods of service. In the Brooklyn Juvenile Court, the six justices of the Court of Special Sessions, Second Division, had been assigned to bi-monthly periods of service. Not all of the justices cared especially for the service in the Children's Court, and consequently some of the justices served for a longer period than two months, so that the court occasionally had the benefit of the service of a judge continuously for a period of four months or longer.

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